

WOMN LLC EVENT

NETWORKING WITH MEN

By Jen Dawson & Lauren Waninski

As attorneys, we understand the importance of networking. Networking often provides insight into unknown opportunities with future colleagues. However, networking can also be intimidating for many young associates. The Women's Bar Association offers many networking opportunities for both young associates and veterans. An example of a mentoring program focused on aiding in the networking process is WOMN LLC, which also offers the added bonus of CLE for attorneys.

WOMN LLC is a fabulous mentoring program that helps senior associate/junior partner women lawyers achieve success at their firms. The organization offers insights based on over 30 years of leadership and management experience in the business environment. The mentoring program pairs seasoned in-house decision-makers with high-achieving young lawyers and aims to teach mentees how to expand their business generation skills, understand economic drivers and develop personal brands that distinguish them in the eyes of clients.

The WOMN LLC summer event featured Susan Sneider, Principal of New Vista Consulting and author of "A Lawyer's Guide to Networking," published by the American Bar Association. Susan led the group of about 30 women in a unique discussion of tips and strategies for effectively networking with men. Below are a few highlights worthy of sharing with more women of the WBAL.

Networking with Men Will Boost Your Career

Women's lack of connections and networking with the C-Suite and influential decision-makers and sponsors is contributing to the under-representation of women in leadership (46% of entry-level positions go to women vs. 19% of women in the C-Suite).

Women are Relational, Men are Transactional

Being aware of the difference in approaches can help bridge the gap and make women more effective in how they network with men. Some specific tips discussed:

- Avoid talking too much, asking too many personal questions, and any physical touch beyond a handshake.

- Avoid any confusion or hidden messages by suggesting breakfasts or morning coffees.
- Aim to find commonalities, but don't force sports chat.
- Dress for success – always wear a suit jacket.

Be Selective in How You Contribute to the Firm

It is widely known that committee membership at law firms is often skewed by gender – recruiting, social, etc. are heavily driven by women, with much less representation on the more powerful committees where important decisions are made – management, compensation, etc. Over time, ask for opportunities to make more of an impact with participation in committees like conflict or insurance/malpractice – these are chances to network with higher-level team members (often men) and by proving yourself in these committees, it can lead to a future in leadership.

Always be the real you

As advice goes, this is an oldie but a goodie. And adapting to your audience (men!) doesn't mean you completely abandon your style or the core of who you are. In the long run, networking based on relationships and helping others proves to be very successful.

Jen Dawson is a Certified Financial Planner™ and is the Chicago Managing Director of Hemington Wealth Management. Jen spends 100% of her time helping lawyers turn their professional success into financial freedom. She is passionate about helping women be the best version of themselves and has recently provided CLE for women lawyers on topics ranging from money matters to business development success and meditation for the busy Breadwinner Woman.

Lauren L. Waninski is an associate attorney at Inman & Fitzgibbons, Ltd. specializing in the areas of Employers Liability Defense, General Liability Defense and Workers' Compensation Defense. Lauren is licensed to practice in Illinois and Michigan.